The United Reform Chapel at the top of Hill Street was built of Bath Stone in 1851. It coping splendidly with the steep slope of Hill Street and neatly closes the east end of Victoria Place. The carvings of swags and symbols, and the barley-sugar-twists to the fronting columns, demonstrates the freestone quality of Bath Stone better than any other building in Newport.

Return to Stow Hill, turn right and continue down the hill.

The tower, spire and the front façade of Bethel Community Church (built 1882-3) are of grey-green Pennant Sandstone with Bath Stone dressings.

St Mary's Presbytery, alongside the church, is built of a very distinctive orange coloured limestone, full of shell debris. This is Ham Hill Stone, of Liassic age from the Yeo Valley area of Somerset. It is widely used in Somerset and the Bristol/Bath area as a dressing with other stones such as Pennant Sandstone. For Newport it is unique.

St Mary's Roman Catholic Church (built 1839-40) has a tower capped with pinnacles, reputedly based upon St Mary's in St Just. The church itself is of Bath Stone while the attached Infants' School next door is of South Wales Pennant Sandstone with Bath Stone dressings.

At the bottom of the hill the Westgate Hotel (now Baltic) built in 1886 has walls of small, tablet-shaped blocks of green Pennant Sandstone and window surrounds and pilasters of Beer Stone (hard Chalk) from the coast of southeast Devon. The door is flanked by columns of polished Shap Granite (note the large, pink feldspar crystals typical of this porphyry).

The buildings opposite the Westgate Hotel in Commercial Street make up a surviving 'townscape' of late Victorian styles, ranging from French Empire to Gothic. Most are over-painted, but the continuity is impressive.

Scale bar approx 250m

Eric Robinson. Produced by the Geologists’ Association South Wales Group

If you want to know more about rocks, fossils and the geology of south Wales, contact the Geologists’ Association South Wales Group, Cymdeithas y Ddaeargwyrr Gwyn De Cymru, Dept of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF10 3NP.

You can also find us at www.swga.org.uk

Geological Walks in Wales

Building stones of Newport High Street and Stow Hill

The streets of Newport are graced with some good Victorian and Edwardian buildings, which record the prosperity of the years when millions of tonnes of coal left the port each year.

Local stone from the Old Red Sandstone and Coal Measures are joined by stones brought by ship or railway so that it is possible to become familiar with British building stones in walks up Stow Hill and High Street.

Take care: some of the walk involves walking along or crossing main roads. Cross at pedestrian crossings and beware of traffic.

This walk is approximately 1.5 km long and should take about 5 hours to complete. The ascent up Stow Hill is quite steep and participants should be careful of the traffic at all times.

The walk begins at the north end of Cambrian Road, opposite the railway station.

1. Seven Bar is an Edwardian building with a curved face to the road. The main face and four upper floors are of yellow Bath Stone with a base of white-weathering Portland Stone, which contains oyster shells. Following the curve into High Street, the building extends into what were Princes Chambers built (1926) of Portland Stone.

Turn left past the Newport Cross and walk along High Street to the first building on the left.

2. Exchange House, the site of the Edwardian general Post Office (built 1907), now a multi-storey car park, has a façade of Portland Stone. Fossils stand out from the weathered surface, while the freestone quality is demonstrated in the carved coat of arms above the entrances.

Turn back towards Princes Chambers and continue down High Street. Turn left into Market Street.

3. On the right the old covered market (built 1887) under an iron-frame and glass roof has walls of bolster-dressed grey-green Coal Measures sandstone (with occasional ironstone nodules) passing up into similarly dressed Old Red Sandstones pitted with cavities. The cornices and window surrounds are of Bath Stone.

Return to High Street and turn left...
The HSBC building opposite also has a base of Cornish Granite but its higher walls are of yellow sandstone, probably Millstone Grit from Yorkshire or Derbyshire. Look for the later repairs in the granite bases. One is of a very different granite texture and another, a metamorphic gneiss.

Turn right into Bridge Street

The statue to Harry William in the middle of Bridge Street has a pliaht of grey Aberdeen Granite that contains black patches of the rock into which it was inserted. It sits on a base of local Pennant Sandstone. The street in this area is paved with Huddersfield Green York Stone.

Continue along Bridge Street. At the fork bear left and then turn left into North Street. Walk up the hill past the car park, until you reach junction with Havelock Street.

The Presbyterian Church of Wales in Havelock Street (built 1864) contains a wide variety of different rock types, colours and textures, to produce a striking façade. There is white limestone with corals and crinoids from Plymouth (Middle Devonian), grey Carboniferous Limestone and some darker Liassic limestones. The igneous rocks include gabbros and granites of different colours. It is possible that some of the stones are basalt bought from the coal exporting shipping lines from distant lands. Bath Stone forms the decorative stone work to the doors and windows.

Opposite, on the junction with Bridge Street, the National Westminster Bank (built 1892) has a base course of silver-grey Cornish Granite, passing up into massive walls of Bath Stone. The contrast in the colour and in the etching of the cross-bededding and the fossil shells which run through the stone faces of the columns, which flank the entrance, reflect the work of the prevailing westerly winds. The vertical fissures in the Bath Stone, now filled with white calcite, are typical of this rock and are known as 'snail-creep'.

Continue along Havelock Street and then turn right into Stow Hill and continue up the right-hand side of the hill.

St Woolos' Primary School, Stow Hill (built 1904) is a typical County Board school of the period, grim but solid. This example is of deep red brick with white stone dressings of Portland Stone that contains fossils.

Further up the hill, at 100 Stow Hill, the Queen Victoria Memorial Almshouses (built 1901) are red brick apartments, related to St Woolos' Cathedral, set about a neat central lawn space.

Turn right into Clifton Road

The retaining wall to Clifton Road is made of slabs of Pennant Sandstone set at different angles. Too much cement has been used in the pointing so that the time is teaching and spreading as a white flowstone dribble over the stones.

Doming the top of the hill is St Woolos' Cathedral. The three storeyed, C15th west tower is built largely of purple-red Old Red Sandstone, probably of the local St Maughn's Group. Intermixed are some conglomerates and sandstones, probably from the Coal Measures. The pale yellow quoin are of local Triassic Sudbrook Sandstone while the later buttresses include Bath Stone and a rather obvious fiery-red render of artificial stone.

The Norman care to the cathedral has external walls of the local St Maughn's Group sandstones. Note that some of these contain really drilled holes. These were made by a bivalve, the common piddock Pholas, which lives in the brackish waters of the estuary, showing that these stones came from a quarry alongside the estuary. The stone occurs in uneven beds which make it difficult to dress and square. Consequently, they are set in a generous amount of sandlime mortar.

The quoin close to the south porch are of Sudbrook Sandstone while the porch itself shows several phases of re-building involving grey Liassic limestones with shells, and a bright pink sandstone which might be Red Wilderness Stone from the Forest of Dean or Sydney.

The tall east end and chancel are 1960s additions.

Piddock boring in Old Red Sandstone, St Woolos' Cathedral

The walls are of brown Coal Measures sandstones in random coursing giving an overall mottled brown effect which is more regular than the mixed lithologies immediately east of the porch. The interior of the cathedral deserves much closer attention but this may be a subject for a future study.

From the cathedral walk back down the east side of Stow Hill to Victoria Place.

Victoria Place is a sudden surprise as a short but complete early Victorian (1884) stucco-fronted pair of terraces, which might have been lifted from Cheltenham or Gloucester. They stand with their original pavings of sandstone flag, their edge-set sandstone kerbs, and their gutters of squared sandstone plates.

Walk to the End of Victoria Place